

Session Ten

Working with Your Doctor

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The NDEP strongly encourages inviting a medical person (health care provider or certified diabetes educator) to participate in any sessions that you conduct to provide support for the discussion and to answer any specific medical questions that may arise.

Background

Many people find it hard to participate in their health care. They may not be sure what questions to ask the doctor, or they may feel that the doctor is in too great a hurry and doesn't have the time to answer their questions.

Objectives

1. To describe the interactions between Calvin and the staff at the doctor's office.
2. To discuss how a person can get the most out of a visit to the doctor.
3. To make the link between diabetes and heart disease.



Time needed for discussion: 45 to 60 minutes.

Materials

For instructions on borrowing *The Debilitator* film, see page 4 of this guide.

The handout *4 Steps to Control Your Diabetes for Life* can be found behind the Handouts tab at the end of this guide.

- DVD of the film *The Debilitator*.
- DVD player/TV monitor.
- Handout: National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) brochure *4 Steps to Control Your Diabetes for Life* (at least one copy for each participant). Order the brochure by fax or mail using the *NDEP Publications Order Form* at the end of this guide, or download it from the Web site <http://www.ndep.nih.gov/diabetes/control/4Steps.htm>.

- Optional: Flipchart or blackboard for writing down key words from discussion.

Method

- Conduct a facilitated discussion (group discussion with a leader asking stimulation questions).
- Play the film, or select scenes from the film as needed.



1. **Tell the group:** Today we are going to talk about two scenes from the film *The Debilitator*: the scene with the radio show entitled “The Good Doctor,” and the scene in which Calvin goes to see Dr. Beverly Goodson. *[You may choose to replay these scenes to refresh the participants’ memories.]*
2. **Tell the group:** Think back to the radio program “The Good Doctor.” The radio program host says of the physician guest on the show, “He speaks the truth—straight from the heart.” Some people think that health care workers shouldn’t tell people the harsh truth about the risk of heart disease and the complications of diabetes because it’s too scary.
3. **Ask:** What do you think health care providers should do?



Make sure to make the following points during the discussion:

- Scare tactics alone are not effective and can push people away.
 - People need to know the truth, and they have a right to know.
 - Some ways and times for giving information are better than others.
4. **Tell the group:** On the show “The Good Doctor,” the heart doctor made several statements that could be shocking.
 5. **Ask:** How did you feel when you heard the doctor **say**:
 - “Others [some people with diabetes] are just time bombs waiting to explode.”

- “Doctors...think that people will never change, so they don’t tell people what to do.”

Begin a discussion with participants about making the most of their doctor visits.

6. **Tell the group:** When Calvin calls Dr. Goodson’s office for an appointment, he is lucky. The office has an open appointment time that day, and he is seen right away.
7. **Ask the group:** Has that been your experience with making an appointment?
 - What do you think Calvin should have done if he had not been able to get an appointment for a month or more?
 - What would you do?

Answers might include:

- Go to the emergency room.
- Stay home and take it easy until you can see the doctor.
- Make an appointment to see another doctor.
- Try home remedies or nonprescription medications.
- Go to a naturopath or traditional healer.
- Pray that things will get better soon.



Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:

- Don’t wait too long for an appointment. Ask if another doctor in the practice can see you as a walk-in or for just one appointment until you can see your regular doctor. Ask the receptionist to call you if the office has any last-minute cancellations.
- Emergency rooms are just for emergencies. Don’t use them as walk-in clinics or for regular care (for example, for refilling prescriptions). Try to think ahead and make appointments with your regular doctor.

- If you don't have a health care provider, seek one out and establish regular follow-up care. Community health centers that accept Medicaid or Medicare, or that provide sliding scale payments for people without insurance, are located throughout the country.
- If you are having chest pressure or increased shortness of breath, DON'T WAIT. Go to the emergency room if you have no other choice.
- It is best to talk to your doctor first before trying home remedies or nonprescription medications.
- Working with other healers (such as a massage therapist or a naturopath) can help you feel better, but such visits are not a substitute for seeing your doctor or other health care provider (such as a nurse practitioner or a physician assistant).

8. **Tell the group:** Think about Calvin's visit to Dr. Goodson. Is there anything that he could have done to get more out of this appointment?

Answers might include the following:

- He could have brought the first doctor's name and contact information so that Dr. Goodson could get his medical records.
- He could have brought any medicines that were prescribed for him by the first doctor, even if he is not taking them now.
- He could have brought a list of questions that he wanted to ask.
- He could have brought his wife or other family member for emotional support and also because "two sets of ears are better than one" for absorbing information during a doctor's visit.

9. **Ask:** How can you get the most out of your visits to the doctor and to other health care providers?



Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:

- Think about your questions ahead of time. Perhaps write them down and give the list to the doctor at the start of the appointment.
- Bring a list of your medicines and a description of how you are taking them (for example, how many pills you take and at what time of day).
- Be honest. If you miss taking many of your pills, just say so and state why (for example, you can't remember to take the one at bedtime, or the medicine upsets your stomach if you take it in the morning).
- Tell your doctor about any nonprescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal remedies that you are taking.
- Bring along your blood glucose monitoring booklet in which you write down your blood sugar measurements.
- Discuss with the doctor what your goals are—what your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol should be, and what can you do to get them under control.
- Discuss other routine tests that people with diabetes should have: eye and foot exams, as well as measurement of A1C, blood pressure, and cholesterol.

Optional Activity: Discussing Diabetes ABCs and Heart Disease

Note: Another module in this guide, “Be Smart About Your Heart: Know Your ABCs,” also discusses the link between diabetes and heart disease.



DVD

1. **Tell the group:** Think about the scene in which Calvin dies of a heart attack in his dream. *[You may choose to replay this scene to refresh participants' memories.]*

2. **Ask:** How realistic do you think this scene is? What are the symptoms of a heart attack?



Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:

- Usually people have some warning symptoms of a heart attack that increase with time.
- People don't usually die suddenly as the first sign of heart trouble, but it is possible to do so.
- A person might not recognize that his or her symptoms are from heart disease. Typical symptoms include:
 - Chest pressure—NOT a sharp pain.
 - Shortness of breath.
 - Nausea, possibly vomiting.
 - Sweating.
 - A feeling of impending doom.
- Not just men are at risk for heart attacks. Women have heart attacks, too. In fact, women with diabetes are even more likely than men with diabetes to die of a heart attack.

3. **Ask the group:** What do you think about the fact that Calvin has a heart attack when he is doing something that he thinks is good for him—getting exercise?



Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:

- Calvin's blood pressure and blood sugar are out of control.
- He doesn't stop when he first starts to feel bad.
- It looks as if he is mowing the lawn during the hottest part of the day (or maybe the heart attack is causing him to sweat). He should have chosen a cooler part of the day to exercise outdoors.

- Before you begin an exercise program, it is best to talk to your doctor to find out what is safe for you.



Classroom Exercise

Give each participant a copy the NDEP brochure *4 Steps to Control Your Diabetes for Life*. Tell participants that they have 5 to 10 minutes to look through the brochure before you call the group back together. Explain that the material in the brochure may help them think of questions that they would like to ask their doctor. After 5 or 10 minutes (depending on how much time is left in the session), ask if anyone needs more time. If yes, give an additional 5 minutes, and then call the group back together.

Ask: Is anyone willing to share a question that you've decided to ask your doctor at your next appointment?

If no one suggests a question, consider choosing a question directly from the NDEP brochure *4 Steps to Control Your Diabetes for Life* for discussion, if time permits.



Homework

Ask each of the participants to take home a brochure and to write down at least one question that they plan to ask the doctor at their next appointment. Suggest that they may also find it helpful to ask others (family and friends) to read the brochure and talk about it together.

